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AUTHOR Lewes, Ulle E.
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ABSTRACT

In an era of educational retrenchment in which career-oriented students are seeking useful, practical instruction, the challenge facing writing departments and writing teachers is to develop a curriculum serving a variety of undergraduate majors without straining budgets and without expanding staffs. Toward that end, the "Concentration in Writing" program was developed and implemented at Ohio Wesleyan University during the late 1970s. Comments about the courses in the program, their appeal to particular groups of students, and the utilization of existing faculty and resources illustrate that writing courses beyond the freshman level are needed and that most liberal arts colleges can implement writing concentrations within the English major. (The writing course descriptions and suggested and required course sequences at Ohio Wesleyan are attached.) (RL)

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Dr. Ulle E. Lewes
Department of English
Ohio Wesleyan University
Delaware, Ohio 43015

"DEVELOPING THE WRITING/COMPOSITION MAJOR"

At least since the 1960's most colleges and universities--and some two-year colleges--have offered writing courses beyond the freshman competency level, and have had no trouble filling such courses with English majors and students seeking accreditation in teaching. As we enter the 1980's, however, we find our original clientele has dwindled: there are few traditional English majors and often even fewer people seeking teaching credentials in any discipline. Many of our current students are said to be "career oriented": that is to say, they are worried about securing those ever-harder-to-find jobs and therefore insist on being offered courses that are "useful" and "practical." Why, then, am I here to talk about a major--or minor--or double major--in writing?

Quite simply because a new group of students is begging for it. To them English is no longer an "irrelevant" subject. It is true that some of our upper-level literature courses are attracting fewer students, but at the same time students are clamoring for more upper level writing courses.

To prove my point, I might use as illustration my own experience at Ohio Wesleyan University, a small liberal arts college in the outskirts of Columbus, Ohio. Ohio Wesleyan has always had a strong commitment to competent writing. It is the only school I know of that urges any

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teacher in any course to submit a grade of "U" or "S" in writing (Unsatisfactory or Satisfactory in writing) along with the usual grade for a course. Students receiving such "U" grades are required to go to the Writing Resource Center--of which I happen to be the director--to eliminate the "U" by means of a program of individualized tutoring. Given the existence of the "U" grade as university policy since 1958, it may be understandable that courses like "Intermediate Composition" and "Report Writing" have always attracted some non-English majors, especially from departments like Education, Journalism, Theatre, Speech, and History. In the past few years, however, we have found such courses to be oversubscribed by as much as 200% (for example, while a section of report writing is limited to 20 students, last fall we had 67 students attempting to enroll in the course). The students were coming from fields we had seldom encountered after the freshman English competency requirement had been dutifully completed: fields like chemistry, zoology, economics, nursing, fine arts and the like.

I believe this shift in numbers and in populations can be explained by reasons that hold true across the country, and apply to the school where you teach as well. Today's students know that they need writing courses, for even our best students are inexperienced in the realm of written discourse. Furthermore, competent writing has become the acknowledged first priority with employers who have been frightened by rumors that "Johnny Can't Write." For example, a survey of 300 employers, conducted

by the Midwest College Placement Service in 1979, indicated that 83% considered "verbal communication" the most important skill in a prospective employee. Therefore the need for and the interest in writing courses is evident. Most of us have attempted to meet the needs of poorly prepared students by creating writing labs and developmental programs, but we have not paid nearly as much attention to upper level courses to enhance students' writing abilities beyond the level of basic proficiency.

The challenge for us, then, is to develop a writing curriculum to serve a variety of undergraduate majors without straining departmental budgets and without expanding our staffs, since most of us have been warned that the 1980's will be a period of retrenchment, not expansion.

I believe this situation represents not a crisis, but a splendid opportunity. As upper level literature courses are attracting ever fewer students, we can offer some of them less frequently and thus be able to add upper level writing courses. Among other things, these writing courses can help us meet the administrative challenge of "number of credit hours generated" by our English Departments. At Ohio Wesleyan this also means that some of the younger teachers get to teach upper level courses, since they are usually the ones who have had some training in the teaching of writing. We can also re-structure our existing courses in "history of the language" and the like to meet the needs of a more diverse audience. If you will look at the handout I have circulated, you may be able to discern from the course descriptions that several of the

courses in our "Concentration in Writing" were already in place before this program was implemented. No doubt larger schools can attempt much more ambitious programs. For example, the University of Tulsa offers a selection of fifteen writing courses, six of which must be taken for a concentration in writing. I must say that I am dazzled by their offerings, but my purpose is to argue for the feasability of a more modest emphasis in writing which can be implemented at even a small school. All you really need for a core curriculum in writing is one or two post-freshman courses in rhetoric, one or two linguistics courses, a few courses specializing in varieties of creative writing and non-fiction writing, and a "capstone" senior seminar in writing.

At Ohio Wesleyan the "Concentration in Writing" came about through meetings and informal discussions among younger teachers seriously interested in composition and older teachers who had taught some of the courses that were already in place.

The program, as it is described in the handout, has evolved over the past four years. Almost 1/2 of our current majors or double majors are emphasizing writing rather than literature. The program obviously needs improvements: even the course descriptions you see before you will be changed and clarified for next year's catalogue. A group of us meets regularily to make the sequence of courses more integrated, and to discuss new developments in our field.

I want to make just a few comments about the handout [see attached appendix] before I conclude with some remarks on further directions.

English 41, "Intermediate Composition," is not a "bonehead" course since all Wesleyan students are required to take not only a basic freshman comp. course but also a second course on the research paper. English 41 focuses on the development of rhetorical modes, and includes both expressive and transactional writing. The course was in place before the "writing major" was invented.

English 50, "Advanced Composition," was also in place but was seldom taught until recently. (At present we have a waiting list of 31 students who wish to take it next fall). It is popular with non-majors as well as majors. Both English 41 and 50 are taught by various interested professors.

English 51, "Report Writing," is a tradition at Ohio Wesleyan. During Commencement events some nostalgic trustee can be counted upon to declare publicly that Mrs. Reed's Report Writing made him the success he is today. Unquestionably the continued popularity of this professor helped generate interest for our other writing courses.

The courses on fiction and verse writing, English 52 and 53, were created several years ago by a professor who is a recognized regional novelist and poet. This man teaches all the creative writing

courses, including the senior creative writing seminar, English 88.

English 55 and 56 were already in place as history-of-the-language and linguistics courses for the traditional English major. They are taught by a senior professor of linguistics.

English 54 and English 89, then, were the only two courses that had to be added to the curriculum to complete the minimal structure of a "concentration" or "Major" in writing. At present they are being offered in alternate years, a situation that will change if demand warrants it. English 54 emphasizes writing about another piece of writing, be it a nursing report or a Shakespearian Sonnet. English 89 focuses on the major genres of non-fiction writing in the working world, and also offers intensive training in editing and re-writing. They are taught by a variety of professors.

As you can see, our program is modest but, I hope you will agree, pedagogically sound. Although we cannot hope to improve this program by hiring "superstars" or creating further new courses at this time, we do have plans for creating a more comprehensive emphasis on writing across the university. For one thing, the Writing Resource Center is becoming a multi-purpose facility for the entire academic community, a resource for anyone from a freshman needing review in basic skills to a professor eager to devise more effective writing assignments. For another thing, twelve professors from non-English disciplines have just

completed a two-term training program to help students write better. Even though these twelve represent a small fraction of the total faculty of 230, we like to think this is a beginning towards creating cross-disciplinary writing courses (sometimes called "W" courses). In time we hope to train enough faculty members to ask all students to take at least two "W" courses as a graduation requirement.

Well. I shall stop here. I'll be happy to answer specific questions later. I do hope I have persuaded you that there is a very present need for writing courses beyond the freshman level, and that almost any liberal arts college can implement a modest "Concentration in Writing" within the English major.

APPENDIX

Dr. Ulle E. Lewes
English Department
Ohio Wesleyan University
Delaware, Ohio 43015

CORE CURRICULUM FOR ALL ENGLISH MAJORS

(After successful completion of a 2-term Freshman composition requirement)

(1) A literature course on the intermediate level (EN 21-48, excluding 41)

(2) A course on English literature (EN 60-69)

(3) A course on American literature (EN 72-75)

(4) A seminar on a literary theme (EN 82-86)

(5) EN 92: Critical Survey of English and American Literature

REQUIRED COURSES FOR WRITING MAJORS ONLY

CREATIVE WRITING	NON-FICTION
(1) EN 41	(1) EN 41
(2) EN 50	(2) EN 50
(3) EN 52 or 53	(3) EN 51 or 54
(4) EN 55 or 56	(4) EN 55 or 56
(5) EN 88	(5) EN 89

OTHER WRITING COURSES

EN 71: Junior independent study

EN 90: Senior independent study

EN 95: Apprenticeships in Teaching of Writing or in Editing (both on-campus and off-campus opportunities)

EN 41 INTERMEDIATE COMPOSITION

A course on the intermediate level which gives the student an opportunity to improve his writing. We will use a composition text by Donald Hall, Writing Well, a reader by Hall and D.L. Emblen, A Writer's Reader, and The Elements of Style by Strunk & White. The student should expect to begin to keep a daily journal, and to do a lot of writing in different forms: essays, stylistic analyses, argument papers, reports, personal memoirs, etc. The final paper will be a research project of the student's own devising.

No exams; no final

In addition to daily journal writing, about 7 short papers (3 pages or so) plus one longer research paper (8-10 pages).

EN 50 ADVANCED COMPOSITION

A course on non-fiction writing which gives students the opportunity to add flavor and variety to their basically correct prose. There will be short reading assignments from some of the great prose stylists in the English language from the Elizabethan age to the present. Students should expect to do writing in class and out of class for every single class meeting. No exams: just writing and revising and criticizing each other's work. Required texts: Richard Lanham's Style; E.D. Hirsch's Philosophy of Composition; James E. Miller's Word, Self, and Reality.

EN 51 REPORT WRITING

Designed for students planning to work in law, business, the sciences--in fact, any work requiring written communication--this course stresses writing adapted for one of three decision-making reading publics: technical, middle technical (or administrative), general public.

You will write four reports and a portfolio of problem-solving letters, revising and writing, probably for more than two hours a day every day. But when the course is over, you will feel confident about your writing skills--as a researcher, organizer, and producer of the kinds of reports the professional world expects a college-trained writer to be capable of.

There are no bluebooks, possibly one or two quizzes, and no final examination. But by the end of the term you will have written the equivalent of a short novel.

I urge only juniors or seniors to enroll in this course, although underclass students are welcome too.

Special feature: writer's cramp or typewriter's elbow.

EN 52 FICTION WRITING

The fiction workshop requires the student to read critically a number of short stories and to write, besides half a dozen assigned technical exercises, two complete short stories, and a revision of one of the stories. A grade for the course is based upon the "collected works" turned in at the end of the term. No tests. Texts: Points of View, an anthology of short stories; Technique in Fiction, a fiction-writing text.

EN 53 VERSE WRITING

Verse Writing is a course for students interested in writing poetry as well as interested in working at discovering just what makes a poem a poem. The course is concerned with the intention, process and structure of the poem and its effect on the reader.

Course Requirements: Ten poems done on the student's own (with no restrictions as to style, structure or substance), plus the completion of twelve assigned exercises. Revisions of some exercises and poems will also be required. At the end of the term, the student is to turn in a "Collected Works" folder containing all work done for the course. This folder is divided into two sections: "Exercises" and "Poems."

EN 54 RESEARCH WRITING

A composition course on the art of research writing which emphasizes the special problems of analyzing or interpreting other written documents, fiction or non-fiction. The course is intended not just for English majors, but for students in all fields (example: pre-law) in which close analysis of texts is required. Writing assignments will include reviews,

explications, analyses, summaries of critical opinion, and research papers. Required texts: Strunk & White's Elements of Style; Harry Shaw's Dictionary of Literary Terms; and Miles & Bertonasco's Prose Style for the Modern Writer. Prerequisites: EN 41 or EN 50 or consent of instructor.

EN 55 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

To what extent does our native language shape our perceptions, thought, and behavior? Is there a universal grammar underlying all natural languages? These two questions have long intrigued scholars and scientists. This course examines the findings of cultural and psychological anthropologists and linguists who are currently approaching the questions with highly varied techniques and discovery procedures.

The course will focus primarily on the languages and cultures of the United States, the Navaho of Arizona, the Swahili-speaking peoples of East Africa, and the Yoruba of Western Africa. Two "common denominators" will be used as controls--the color spectrum and family structure.

Mid-term, paper, final examination.

Students will be encouraged to choose a paper topic which will relate the work in this course to work in their major.

EN 56 THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE

This course is useful for students studying English and foreign languages and for those planning to enter law school or to teach secondary school English.

The first part of the course traces the origin and development of the English language; the second part describes the structure of modern American English. Two approaches are used: structural linguistics and transformational grammar.

Classroom work is a combination of lecture, discussion, and work on the blackboard.

A project on some phase of language study is required.

In-term tests: quizzes and mid-term. Final: Yes (three hours allowed).

EN 88 CREATIVE WRITING SEMINAR

For creative writing majors and minors. To enroll in the course, a student must have successfully completed Fiction Writing or Verse Writing, and Advanced Composition. In the writing seminar, the student may work on a project of some length, either fiction or poetry. The group will meet one night a week at Mr. Flanagan's house to read and criticize works-in-progress. The seminar should be thought of as an opportunity for intensive work by those students who have already learned the basics of their craft.

EN 89 SEMINAR IN NON-FICTION WRITING

A concentrated seminar in non-fiction writing for fifteen people eager to polish their styles, increase their fluency, learn how to edit, and receive a great deal of critical reaction to their writing. Students will write a paper every week (about 4-5 pages), and will edit (correct and comment on) the papers of all other members of the class. Grades will be weighted 60% for the writing and 40% for the careful editing of classmates' papers. Required texts: Richard Lanham's Revising Prose and John Trimble's Writing with Style.

Prerequisites: EN 50 and one of the following: EN 51, 52, 53, 54, or consent of the instructor.